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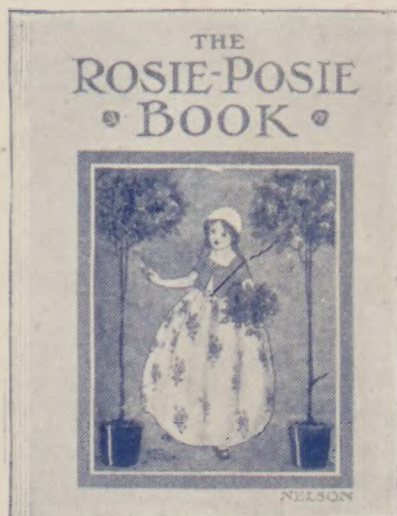
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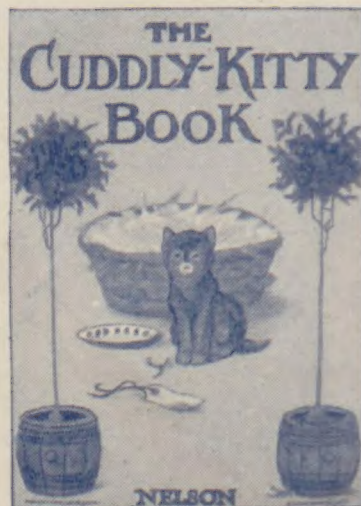
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THE CHILDREN'S PAPER



THE OUTLAWS IN SHERWOOD FOREST.

(From an old lithograph in the Mechanics' Institute, Nottingham.)

Robin Hood is an outlaw bold,
Under the greenwood tree ;

|
Bird, nor stag, nor morning air,
Is more at large than he.

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD., LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.

The Boyhood of Thomas Alva Edison.

IT is not only in fairy tales that we meet the magician who with a word or a touch of his wand can turn darkness into light, carry messages like the wind, and make the commonplace of everyday life wonderful. It is not only in fairyland that such magicians are born, for sometimes the dull old world produces just as wonderful a wizard as any that are to be found between the covers of Grimm or Hans Andersen.

In the little village of Milan, in the State of Ohio, on the 11th of February 1847, Thomas Alva Edison was born. There was no mysterious romance about the birth of this magician. No one thought him very wonderful at all, except perhaps his mother, and even she found him only a tiresome boy at times. As to Alva's father, he thought the boy rather slow and stupid, and was quite worried about it. "Why, why, why," was on his lips from morning till night, and the number of questions he asked quite wore out his father's patience. He wanted to know the reason of everything and to prove for himself what was right and what was wrong.

Just like ordinary boys, he was always getting into mischief, but whether it was by magic or good luck he always managed to get out of it again. First of all he fell into the canal that ran past the house where he lived, but he was pulled out before he was drowned. Then he tried falling into a pile of wheat in a grain lift,

and was nearly smothered, but he managed to get out of that too. He had the top of one finger chopped off instead of the skate strap which he was holding, and when he tried to build a fire in a barn it was not surprising that the barn itself caught fire in the most ordinary way. There was nothing magical either in the punishment that followed, when he was publicly whipped in the village square as an example to other naughty boys.

And yet in Alva Edison's big head the magic was slowly working, although no one guessed it.

School had very little to do with helping on the magic, for the boy was only there three months, and all the time he sat at the foot of the class. "Al," as he was called, was a veritable dunce, and the teacher could make nothing of him. Perhaps, as usual, he asked too many questions, and very likely they were questions she could not answer.

But Alva's mother was vexed that her boy should be called stupid, and so she took him away from school and began to teach him herself. Down in the cellar he was allowed to keep rows upon rows of little bottles, collected from all parts of the town and filled with all sorts of chemicals, with which he made experiments, and each new discovery helped to add to the magic of his brain.

Sometimes, though, the experiments were a failure and the results far from pleasant.

"I will teach you to fly," he said one day to Michael Oates, a boy older than himself who helped with the work of the house.



THOMAS ALVA EDISON AT WORK IN HIS LABORATORY.

Now Michael had a great admiration for Alva and quite believed he was able to do what he said, so when he was told to swallow a fearful dose of Seidlitz powders he took them without a murmur, believing that the gas they produced would hoist him up.

But, alas! instead of flying he was soon lying on the ground twisted with pain, and his cries of agony brought Alva's mother to the rescue, and she brought out the switch which was kept behind the old grandfather's

clock and whipped the experimenter soundly.

But neither the failure of the experiment nor the whipping discouraged Alva greatly. He was sure the idea was all right, and it was only Michael who was all wrong.

There was not much money to spare in Alva's home, and he made up his mind to try to earn money for himself. First he tried market gardening with Michael (who could dig if he could not fly), and he grew and sold vegetables

24 The Boyhood of Thomas Alva Edison.

for a while, but he did not like the work. Then after much persuasion his mother allowed him to sell newspapers on the railway, and that suited him much better. He had time to read the newspapers and magazines as well as to sell them, and as he went backwards and forwards in the train from Huron, where he now lived, to Detroit, he was allowed to use one of the vans for his beloved experiments, and here he collected all his bottles and worked away as he had done in the cellar at home. Even that was not enough to keep him busy, and when the Civil War broke out and every one wanted news, he started a little printing press in the van, and printed a newspaper of his very own called *The Weekly Herald*, which he sold at "three cents a copy."

But, sad to relate, an accident happened to the new laboratory, and it and the printing press came to an untimely end. The train was running along a badly laid track one day, when it gave a sudden lurch; and before Alva could catch it, a stick of phosphorus fell from the shelf on to the floor of the van, and in an instant the boards were in flames. The guard, a Scotsman with a quick temper, managed to put the fire out and save his van, but he was furious with the boy, and boxed his ears so soundly that Alva ever afterwards suffered from deafness. Then as soon as the first station was reached the bottles and the printing press were bundled out on to the platform, and he was left there, "tearful and indignant," in the midst of the ruins.

It was after this that the magician began the work that was to touch the

whole world with magic. And this is how his chance came. He was standing one day talking to the station-master at a little railway station, when he saw a tiny boy, the son of the station agent, go wandering along the rails on which a train was coming swiftly along. There was not a moment to be lost, and in the flash of an instant Alva had jumped down and caught the child just as the train dashed past, and only just in time, for the wheel of one of the passing carriages struck his heel. The child's father was not rich enough to reward the boy with money, but instead he offered to teach him telegraphy, and so the magic wand was put into the boy's hand.

Tiny wires that bind the world together, that carry voices and messages through the silent air, fairy boxes filled with music and the sound of voices once breathed in and kept enchained for ever—are not these the work of a magician as wonderful as any that has ever lived in fairy tale?

Golden Text for the Month.

Fear thou not ; for I am with thee : be not dismayed ; for I am thy God : I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will help thee ; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.—ISAIAH xli. 10.

Motto for February.

The glory of life is to love, not to be loved ; to give, not to get ; to serve, not to be served.—HUGH BLACK.

Sent in by DORIS THOMPSON,
St. Dominic's School, Harpenden, Herts,
to whom a book prize has been awarded.

How, Indeed.

TWO men were waiting for a train, says the *Argonaut*, and one said, "I will ask you a question, and if I cannot answer my own question I will buy the tickets. Then you ask a question, and if you cannot answer your own you buy the tickets." The other readily agreed.

"Well," the first man said, "you see those rabbit holes? How do they dig those holes without leaving any dirt round them?"

"I don't know," the other admitted. "That's your question; answer it yourself."

The first man winked and replied, "They begin at the bottom and dig up."

"But," said the second man, "how do they get at the bottom to begin?"

"That's your question," was the first man's rejoinder. "You'll have to answer it yourself."

The other man bought the tickets.

Solution to January Fable Puzzle.

A FOX one summer day spied some grapes hanging over a wall, and he sprang to seize them, but made too short a bound. Again he jumped with all his might, but still he failed to reach the grapes. He tried time after time to get them, but did not succeed. At last he grew tired, and went away muttering to himself, "It is not worth my while to try, for the grapes are sour."

Moral: Those who cannot get a thing will say they do not want it.

A Bank from a Cocoanut Tree.

WHEN a Philippine boy wishes a bank for his extra savings he looks up into a cocoanut tree, selects a nut of suitable size, knocks it down, punches two small holes in the end and leaves the rest of the work for the ants to do. Soon they enter the nut and do not leave it until the interior is as free from meat as if it had been scoured.

Then the boy strips the hairy coat from the outside, polishes the nut well, and cuts a slit on one side to receive the coins. So there you are—a bank from a cocoanut tree!

Very Lucky.

HE was telling a thrilling story of one of his hairbreadth escapes in America, and a dear old lady was listening eagerly, drinking in every word.

"The wolves were upon us," he said, "bellowing and roaring, as I have so often heard them. We fled for our lives! I don't deny it; but every second we knew the ravenous pack was gaining on us. At last they were so near that we could feel their muzzles against our legs——"

"Ah!" gasped out the lady. "How glad you must have been that they had their muzzles on!"

Two voices are there; one is of the sea,
One of the mountains; each a mighty
voice;

In both from age to age thou didst
rejoice,

They were thy chosen music, Liberty!

WORDSWORTH.

Our Bible Story.

JEREMIAH THE PROPHET.

IN the little village of Anathoth, not very far from Jerusalem, a boy was learning his lessons and playing his games, very much like other boys, except perhaps that, as he was the son of a priest, he had more difficult lessons to learn and less time for play.

Jeremiah, for this was the boy's name, was quick to learn. He knew all about the history of his people and how God had led them and helped them, and as he grew bigger and stronger two things grew greater and stronger in his heart as well—his love for his country and his love for God.

Then one day a wonderful thing happened. God's message came to him telling him he was to be God's messenger, and go and speak to the people of his nation. It must have been an awesome moment for the boy when he first heard God's voice; but he found words to answer, although they were halting and rather fearful.

"Ah, Lord God!" he said, "behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child."

But God's message came again clear and plain. "Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee."

And even as Jeremiah listened, God's finger was laid upon his mouth, and the message was written in his heart.

He was alone when he heard God's voice. Perhaps he was in one of the village gardens which lay bleak and

bare in the wintry light, and then suddenly a beautiful sight caught his eye. It was an almond tree, covered with pure white blossoms, called in his language "the waker," because it wakes up and puts out its flowers when all the other trees and plants are still in their winter sleep.

"Jeremiah, what seest thou?" came God's voice again.

"I see a rod of an almond tree," answered Jeremiah.



He had been feeling rather bewildered, and longed for a sign that he was indeed to be God's messenger, and this was the sign God sent. As the white almond blossom was awake while everything else seemed dead or sleeping, so God said that He, the great Waker or Watcher, would fulfil every one of His words. After that God taught him by another sign that evil days were in store for his country: that a heathen nation would come sweeping down from the north, and would destroy Jerusalem and carry the people away captive.

This, then, was the message which

Jeremiah was to carry to the people to warn them that God would punish them for all their wrongdoing. It was a hard message to take; the people, he knew, would be very angry, and his own heart was heavy with sorrow to think that all this evil was to happen to his beloved land.

But no better messenger could have been chosen. He was quite fearless and steadfast as a rock. Nothing could stop him from his work or tempt him to keep silence.

At first, however, things were not so difficult for the young prophet. The good King Josiah was reigning, and he had tried to make the people give up their idols and all their evil ways, and he was glad that Jeremiah should bring God's message and cry it aloud.

But the more the people listened, the more angry they became. They hated to be told that God meant to punish them, and yet they would do nothing to show Him that they wanted Him to forgive them. Instead of that they planned how they could silence the voice that spoke the message; and so Jeremiah was obliged to flee away from his own village and hide himself from those who wanted to kill him.

Then followed more evil days. The good king was killed in battle, all he had tried to do was swept away, and the people needed God's warning message more than ever.

And the message came. One day a strange figure appeared in the streets of Jerusalem. The people knew from his robe that he was a priest, but why did he wear such a dirty, ragged girdle? A man's girdle was the chief part of his

dress, and it was a shame to the city that a priest should be seen in the streets wearing one so soiled and torn.

Then the man in the ragged girdle began to speak to them, and his words were like whips. The soiled, unlovely girdle was like the people themselves, he said. God had meant them to be clean and beautiful; and instead, they were stained with their ugly sins, not fit to belong to God. Would nothing make them repent and turn to God? Then, suddenly, he took a clay jar and dashed it to pieces on the rock.

"Look," he cried, "that is how God will break you and your city."

But it was all of no use. The people first scoffed and then grew angry, and in their rage they seized Jeremiah and put him in the stocks, where all the passers-by might mock at him.

"See the mad prophet!" they cried in derision.

It was easy to laugh at the prophet, but in a very short time a feeling of uneasiness began to spread amongst the people of Jerusalem. It looked as if there might be truth in the prophet's warning. From the north came news that the King of Babylon was marching on his conquering way, and who knew where he would stop?

There was no warning voice crying in the streets of Jerusalem now. Jeremiah was shut up by the king's order, but even in prison he was writing the message which he could no longer cry aloud. And when the message was written it was carried to the king.

Now the king was sitting in his winter palace, and a fire was burning on the hearth when the prophet's message

was read to him. And, like his people, he would not listen. In a great rage he seized the roll of writing, cut it in pieces with a penknife, and threw the pieces into the fire to be burned.

Again it was easy enough to destroy



the message, but that did not serve to stop the punishment that was coming nearer and nearer. Jerusalem could not hold out against the mighty hosts of Babylon which came sweeping on to overwhelm it, and ere long the people were taken captive and carried away to distant Babylon. Only a poor little remnant was left behind.

It might have been thought that those who were left would have listened now to God's messenger as he still cried to them to repent and to look forward

to the time when the captives would return and God would remember His promise to set on the throne of David the King of all the earth. But it was not so. More hardships were in store for Jeremiah.

He was an old man now, worn out with suffering and great sorrow; but, to silence him once for all, he was lowered into a horrible pit which had been dug in the courtyard of the palace to drain off the rain water. There was not enough water in it to drown him, but there was deep mud at the bottom, and into this he sank. There they left him without food to die.

But he was not to die yet. A slave of the court who loved him managed to get a rope and some old rags, and these he lowered into the pit, bidding Jeremiah put the rags as pads under his arms and then slip the cords over them, ready to be drawn up.

His life was saved, but only to endure fresh sorrows and suffering. Again Jerusalem was besieged, and this time when the conquerors left the city was laid in ruins, the walls were broken down, and the beautiful temple was burned to the ground, while the old prophet was carried away from the land which he loved to die in a strange country among a strange people.

Was his life a failure? It seemed so in man's eyes, but God who had shown him the sign of the white almond rod, God the Waker and Watcher, looked down upon the work of His messenger and was satisfied, for "he that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."

Pumas.

THERE are two kinds of large "cats" to be found in the Americas—the puma and the jaguar, which have been called the lion and the tiger of the New World. The puma, about which I am now going to tell you, is considered the *lion* of the pair, but there are differences between this beast and the noble hunter of the plains.

To begin with, the puma is much smaller than the lion. Hunters have said that it is more like a lioness to look at. Its coat is tawny, but it has no mane; it purrs like a cat, but it never roars—only grunts instead. It can spring like a lion upon its prey, but it can climb trees also, which the lion cannot do. It does not show the great courage, either, which the lion of the Old World is usually supposed to possess.

There are queer stories which seem to point to the fact that the puma cherishes a love for man; perhaps I should say the puma "of the south," for I am inclined to think that the answer to the question often put as to whether the beast is cowardly before man, or is kindly disposed to him, lies in the fact that there are *two kinds* of puma. The northern puma is almost extinct—that is the same beast from whose ravages the early United States settlers are supposed to have suffered so much. They were forced, according to old tales, to hunt *their* pumas without mercy; and it is in consequence of this hunting, no doubt, that these northern beasts are now so scarce. The southern puma—which,

on the other hand, is plentiful enough in the forests as well as on the plains—was called by the old Spaniards "Amigo del Cristiano," or the "friend of the Christians." Natives of to-day declare that nothing will induce it to hunt man, or even to defend itself against man; and not only the natives, but European sportsmen too, have come to believe this. There is a story of a traveller who camped by night close to the playground of several lively pumas, whose gambols he watched happily until sleep claimed him, for he was perfectly confident that they would not harm him. Native children may stay on the plains too, unprotected, if the puma be the only large beast abroad; and a hunter who slung his hammock under a tree had a puma for sleeping companion, lying just beneath him on the ground, and purring in a loud and friendly tone all night.

But it is not on account of the *size* of man that the puma refuses to fight him. Nobody should call the American lion a coward who has seen him spring with his full force upon the back of a jaguar or bear, and come off victorious from the fight. The wild horses, too, of South American plains are believed to have become almost extinct owing to the hunting of this wild beast. He is a sturdy enough fighter, it seems, but one who is inclined to look with kindly and indulgent feeling upon man! Still, just because of his brave hunting, the puma is a dreadful trial to settlers, farmers, and inhabitants of the south. His methods of dining are extravagant, to say the least of it;

for he will kill far more beasts than he needs, taste each one, and then leave them, to return later. Fifty sheep may be destroyed in one night by a raiding puma; and if there are no large animals round about, he will be content with monkeys, sometimes climbing the trees to get them. What a screeching and shrieking and anxious, terrified chattering there must be at such a time from the frightened little "creatures of the sun!"

On account of the puma's cattle raids, one can easily understand that he must be hunted; for however affectionate and friendly disposed the beast may feel towards man, he cannot be allowed to become master of the farms. His own habits help in his capture, and the natives, understanding these, have good advice to offer if a hunt is suggested. "Wait," they say, "and watch the sky; the birds of prey will show you where he lies!" So they do; for the puma has a habit of covering the "kill" that he has not time to eat with branches, and then crouching beside them to wait. The birds soon scent out the meat, and group together in the sky above the place, hovering overhead. Suddenly they may call out in fear and wheel rapidly away; and this means, to the clear-eyed native scout, that the puma is lying in wait below, that the birds have seen him and retreated, and that now is the time for the hunt to begin.

Dogs are used for puma hunting, and a special kind of dog is bred for the purpose—a sort of fast-going terrier with very long legs, which is splendid

at the job. When their prey has been tracked to its lair by the "kill," the dogs and men follow it; lassos and bolos are used in the hunt. Bolos are cords weighted with stones, which are thrown by the expert hand of a horseman so that they become entwined round the legs of the puma. Then the lasso comes into play, and, tightly caught in its noose, the captured beast is dragged along the plains after the flying horse.

Dogs are his hated foes. Wherever and whenever he sees a dog, in the South American plains or in the London Zoo, his bearing changes, and he becomes fierce and furious. There are stories of tamed and affectionate pumas who have become "wild" again at the sight of some dog.

One of the most interesting of puma stories is a very old one; perhaps it may be nothing more than a legend, but it is none the less readable for that. It is said that in 1536 the Spanish settlers at Buenos Ayres suffered from a dreadful famine. Their cattle died, no crops grew, and there seemed no outlook for them save starvation. Away farther into the country, on the land held by the Indians, there was plenty of food; but by the governor's orders none of the Spanish settlers were permitted, on pain of death, to cross into the far woods and ask for food, for fear probably of giving away the news of their weak state to their enemies the Indians, and thus perhaps bringing danger upon their settlement. A woman, Maldonata, however, could stand the privations no longer, and she managed to make her way to the



far forest, where, after her hunger had been partly appeased with the wild fruits to be found there, she lay down to sleep in a cave. She was wakened by the cries of a sick female puma, and putting all her fears aside, the woman nursed it and did what she could for it in its suffering. A friendship sprang up between the two, and later, when the puma became the mother of a family of cubs, she and Maldonata still lived together—the mother puma hunting for food each day, and giving a share of the spoils to her new friend.

But after a time the cubs grew older, and they with their mother left the cave. Maldonata was left alone, and in her daily search for food she at last fell into the hands of the soldiers, who took her before the governor to answer to a charge of treachery. She was condemned to be tied to a tree, there to die from the teeth of wild beasts, or from the pangs of hunger.

But this was not to be. The soldiers who obeyed the orders bound her in the forest and left her there, returning in a few days to make certain as to her fate. To their amazement the victim was still alive and well, guarded by a great female puma from a horde of hungry jaguars and other wild beasts that prowled growling around.

Maldonata was released from the tree, and the governor, who, so the story tells, was "ashamed to avow himself more heartless than a puma," pardoned her, and sent her home.

Though pumas rarely interfere with human beings, we must not be too certain of their kindly feelings towards

us, as the following tale will show. In a few years ago a little boy and girl in Canada were walking through a forest going home from school. The girl was about seven, and the boy perhaps ten.

A puma suddenly sprang out upon them from among the trees, and seized the little girl. The boy displayed great courage; far from running off in terror he at once rushed to her aid, and made the creature loose its hold. The puma then turned on the boy. The little girl, who knew that she could not do much to help him, hurried off to call for assistance, and came back with several men. They drove the creature off, and subsequently shot it. The boy was rather badly hurt; but soon got well, and he received the Albert Medal for his cool and gallant conduct.

So perhaps it is as well that when we see a puma, there are good strong barriers between this friendly mannered, purring puma and ourselves.

Snoover.

WHEN Snoover went to see the world, his family all tried to fit him out with everything that forethought could provide. His mother gave him handkerchiefs; his dad a fountain pen; His aunt Ammonia wrote a cheque for one pound three and ten; His cousin Julia showed him how to cook Korean rice, And Uncle James said, "Come to me and I'll give you advice."

Now Uncle James had travelled far and been to the world's end;

in Paraguay a jaguar was quite a personal friend ;
 A large orang, in far Penang, still sent him Christmas greetings,
 And he always got the notices of Klondyke Bears' Club meetings.
 His knowledge of the world was wide, and wonderful as well,
 And Snoover listened carefully to all he had to tell.

"Remember, Nephew Snoover," said his uncle, "you must never let any animal suppose you do not think him clever,
 And beautiful, and strong as well ; your aim must be to charm.
 For instance, with the chimpanzee, walk *always* arm-in-arm ;
 With elephants your talk should be, 'How fine a thing is size !'
 With marmosets you'll say, 'True beauty's only in the eyes.'

"The best of beasts," the uncle said, "at times are out of sorts,
 When visitors are liable to be received with snorts.
 When passing through the jungle you should keep extremely wide
 Of a South American jaguar who's got a pain inside.
 Then a bear with bad neuralgia's very easily annoyed,
 While a crocodile with toothache is a party to avoid ;
 And you can't have company manners if you've got the dreadful ache
 Of a North Sea whale who's swallowed three old anchors by mistake.

"Then the subjects that you talk of you must choose with utmost care ;

Thus it is not well to mention rugs when visiting a bear.

With the ostrich you should not discourse on how to trim a hat,
 Nor on waltzing with the elephant, or plumage with the bat ;
 While, should you chance to be in conversation with a seal,
 Tippits and muffs are matters with which you *dare* not deal.

"Remember that the sloth says just exactly what he feels ;
 The panther much dislikes unpunctuality at meals ;
 The gorilla asks his guests to be in bed by half-past ten,
 And people who write verses he does not invite again ;
 While the moose, though very courteous, for bed is never late :
 His rule is six in winter, and in summer half-past eight."

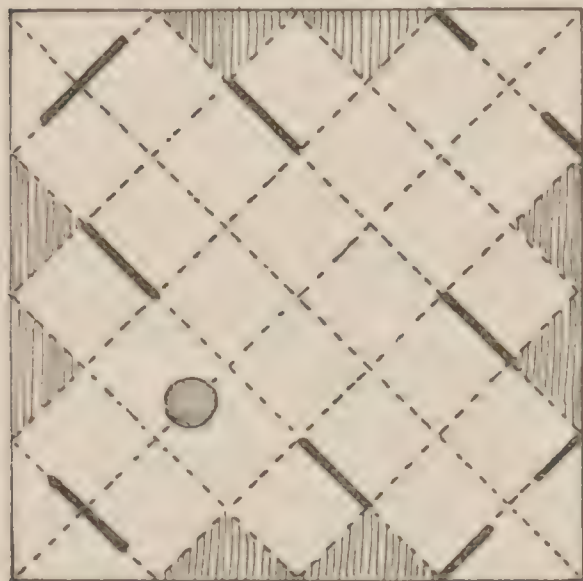
And now our Snoover's started, and round the world he goes.
 He's breakfasted with polar bears on wide Spitzbergen floes.
 At Guayaquil an armadillo taught him how to box.
 He'd a most delightful picnic with a tiger at French Rocks.
 In Van he helped a porcupine to find a missing quill,
 And with his fountain pen at Perth he wrote a wombat's will.

He saw a woolly llama home near Quito after dark.
 At Nicobar he came across an old and purblind shark.
 The shark with tears explained his fears : he could not use his eyes,

And unless kind folk came with him
could get no exercise.
So side by side, that evening's tide,
they went a quiet swim—
Poor simple Snoover, I regret that
that's the end of him!

The Paper Box.

TAKE a square of stout paper and by successive foldings make all the creases indicated by the dotted lines in the illustration. Cut away the



eight little triangular pieces that are shaded, and cut through the paper along the dark line. The second illustration shows the box half folded up, and you will have no difficulty in completing it.

The box will have an added interest if, before folding, you cut out a circular piece as indicated in the diagram. When the box is complete ask father to fill it for you with tobacco smoke by blowing it gently through the hole. Now if you hold it horizontally, and

softly tap the side that is opposite to the hole, an immense number of perfect rings can be produced from one mouthful of smoke. It is best that



there should be no currents of air in the room. Now one of these rings, if properly directed on its course, will travel across the room and put out the flame of a candle.

Some Old Conundrums.

WHY was the first day of Adam's life the longest?—Because it had no Eve.

When is a schoolmaster like a man with one eye?—When he has a vacancy for a pupil.

Why is the Prince of Wales like fifteen shillings?—Because he only needs a crown to become a sovereign.

Why is the Isle of Wight a fraud?—Because it has "Needles" which you cannot thread, "New-port" which you cannot bottle, "Cowes" which you cannot milk, and "Freshwater" which you cannot drink.

When is a soldier not half a soldier?—When he is in quarters.

When is your nose like a certain vegetable?—When it is a little reddish (radish).

When are eyes not eyes?—When the wind makes them water.

Why should men avoid the letter A?—Because it makes men mean.

THE SERIAL STORY.

The Slap-Bang Boys.

BY ANGELA BRAZIL.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUG-OUT.

GIBBET COPSE was a plantation of pines and holly trees and hazel bushes that lay in a hollow far up on the moor. Past generations had hanged felons here, and left their bodies dangling in chains; and though our humane times had abolished the custom, the old name still clung to the place and gave it an evil reputation. Its lonely position and gruesome traditions had caused it to be little frequented. The village boys sometimes dared each other to go birds'-nesting there; but, as a rule, no one disturbed its solitude. In ordinary circumstances Bob, Bert, and Billy might have hesitated before penetrating into such an ill-omened spot. Under the influence of their oath, however, their courage was at high-water mark.

The Slap-Bang Boys therefore scaled the fence with a dash worthy of their name, and keeping close together, began to reconnoitre. The plantation was not very large. In the course of half an hour they had explored it thoroughly, from the little sand quarry near the road to the old ruined cottage in the field on the outskirts. The most careful search revealed nothing of importance. There was no trace or sign of former occupation.

"Still, if it's true what the milk-boy says, and lights were really seen here, somebody must have been flashing them; and that somebody may come again, and we'll be on the look-out for him," said Bob.

"Let's establish our base," declared Bert militantly.

They all agreed that nothing could be done without a dug-out. It was the very first and foremost measure. They selected a spot in a bank where the soil looked soft, and Bob began to dig underneath the roots of a tree. Bert helped to shovel away the earth, and Billy, for lack of any implement to work with, had to be content to look on. It was a warm job and a dirty one, for the ground was wet with yesterday's rain.

Bob toiled away like any trench digger, and soon had something to show for his labour. The roots of the tree made a natural arch, and by scooping out the soil below them a little cave began to be formed. Bob felt cautiously inside with his hands.

"There's a big stone here," he announced. "If I work all round it I can loosen it, and we'll get it out. Jemima! The blooming old thing's stuck in tight! Billy, you bluebottle, get me a bit of thin shale to scrape with. Don't stand staring like a stuffed owl!"

"Well, how can I help when you *will* do all the work yourself?" returned the insulted Billy. "If I'd known what you wanted to do, I'd have brought a thingumbob—what d'you call it? trowel—with me."

"Don't argue with your superior

officer!" growled Bob's voice from the depths of the dug-out. "Give me a stone, quick! A sharp one, mind! That's the ticket. Now if I get the soil away here, this bit of rock ought to budge. Oh, thunder!"

As Bob exclaimed there was a rushing noise, and a sudden heavy fall of earth choked the excavation. The startled boys behind him heard a smothered yell, and beheld his feet wildly kicking through a mass of soil and small stones. They had the presence of mind each to seize a boot and tug, and in half a minute drew out their leader, very spluttering and short of breath, but otherwise uninjured.

"Strafe the old dug-out! It was a dirty trick to play me! That stone came with a run, and brought half the bank with it. It'll have made a big clearance though. We'll shovel out the soil, and you'll see there'll be quite a respectable burrow."

"I vote we have some prög first," suggested Billy, producing the half loaf which he had carried. "Are those pasties all smashed to smithereens in your pocket?"

The distribution of rations was quite in the plan of campaign, so the Brigade squatted on stones and partook of hunks of bread and fragments of pastry, the tarts having suffered badly in the avalanche. Greatly refreshed, they set to work again with spade and shovel, and at the end of an hour had quite a creditable little dug-out as the result of their trouble. "Buckingham Palace," as they christened it, was just big enough to hold the three of them; and when they had dragged a pile of

brushwood and flung it across the entrance, no casual passer-by would have been able to detect its presence.

"Now it's here when we want it," announced Bob with huge satisfaction. "We can work our outposts from to-morrow. Mind, not a single word of this to anybody! Not a soul is to get wind of it except ourselves!"

"D'you think I'd break my oath?" protested Bert hotly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PEDLAR'S PACK.

THE Slap-Bang Boys reached home an hour late for dinner, and in a state of dirt and dilapidation that wrung indignant remonstrance from the outraged Connie.

"What have you been doing with yourselves?" she inquired. "You look like mudlarks! Take your boots off before you go upstairs, and wash your hands and faces. We've kept some dinner for you, though you don't deserve it. Where have you been all morning?"

"Oh, only just for a walk," said Bob airily. "The roads are a little dirty to-day certainly, after the rain."

"You've been up to something, though, three of you," she volunteered. "I hope it's nothing that will get you into trouble. I don't want a policeman coming to complain about you while mother's away. It's I who'd have to interview him and try to screen you. Nice little business for me! I believe I'd let him take you all off and lock you up till the holidays are over."

What a blissful calm there'd be in the house ! ”

The Brigade had promised itself to reconnoitre the wood on the following morning ; but next day the heavy rain was sufficient to deter even the energy of slap-bang boys.

“ It'll very likely clear up after dinner, and then we'll go,” suggested Bert, who was longing to take a turn among the tools in father's attic workroom.

Billy had also interesting projects that he wanted to pursue indoors, so Bob, who was ready to brave the elements in a mackintosh, was overruled for once. Of course he might have gone alone ; but it is not much fun to be leader of a brigade when the company mutinies and refuses to march. He haunted Connie instead, and told her such awesome stories of burglars, who broke into houses while the heads of the establishments were absent, that she grew quite alarmed.

“ I shan't sleep in peace till mother comes home,” she declared. “ I hadn't thought about burglars. I wish we'd a bull-dog or a man-trap or something. I shall lie awake listening to every sound now. I hope Hilda locks up properly at nights.”

“ Don't worry ! We'll put a coal-box on the stairs to trip up burglars, and I'll take the poker to bed with me,” said Bob soothingly. “ Remember you've three men in the house to protect you ! ”

“ Men, indeed ! ” exploded Connie. “ Jemima ! You give me spasms ! ” Which was horrible slang for a girl ; but then she was agitated.

Rather disconsolate, and at a loss for

something to do, Bob strolled into the kitchen. The maids were upstairs, but a loud knocking resounded at the back door. He obligingly opened it. A man stood outside in the rain. He wore a shabby coat and a dripping bowler hat, and carried a pedlar's box in his hand. His keen dark eyes were very close together, and his nose was of the aquiline description. He looked discomposed at seeing Bob. He had evidently expected to be confronted with a feminine vision.

“ Cook in the kitchen ? ” he asked ingratiatingly.

“ No ; she's upstairs, and so's Maude. They don't want any of your things, and no more do I,” returned Bob, as the pedlar began to open his box.

“ I've a fine lot in brooches, lockets, hairbrushes, combs,” ran on the man fluently. “ Razors is hardly your line yet ; but look here, what 'ud you say to this now ? ”

He lifted up the tray of his box and removed a piece of cotton wool. Bob gasped, for underneath lay a small pistol, the very sort it had always been his wildest ambition to possess.

“ Fifteen-and-six ! ” said the man persuasively.

Bob shook a regretful head. “ Haven't got that much in the world ! ”

“ You've no need to give it in cash,” urged the pedlar. “ I'll swop with you if you like. I'm a sporting kind of a chap. Any old silver or old jewellery in the house ? No ? Well, anything else in the way of antiques ? I'm a bit of a dealer.”

“ There are a few old things in the lumber room,” said Bob, remembering

that mother had set aside a consignment for the next rummage sale. "I don't believe they're wanted. Would you care to come and look at them?"

The pedlar did not need pressing. He followed Bob upstairs at once, like a wet shadow.

Arrived in the lumber room, his keen glance travelled for three seconds over the rummage, and transferred itself to a dilapidated lantern clock that lay in a corner. This he picked up and inspected closely.

"The thing wouldn't be much good to me," he declared; "but just to oblige you I'd swop you for it. Shall we say done?"

He brought out the pistol again and displayed its beauties, showing Bob how to load it. The latter hesitated, and was lost. "I don't suppose for a minute that clock's wanted," he argued to himself.

"Well, you've got a bargain, young gentleman," said the pedlar smoothly. "I suppose I can take this piece of brown paper? What's this you've got here?" bending over a box in the corner.

"Only the remains of Dad's 'wireless.' He had to take it down at the beginning of the war."

Bob spoke abstractedly. He was absorbed with the new pistol. He did not notice that the pedlar, with his back turned to him, popped a stealthy hand inside the box and drew out one or two small parts of the wireless telegraphy mechanism. These were wrapped up with the clock in less time than it takes to tell it, and the dealer in antiques made a hurried departure.

CHAPTER V.

HOME DEFENCES.

UNDER pledge of utmost secrecy Bob exhibited his treasure to the rest of the Brigade. "We won't tell the women," he said largely. "Connie would only make a fuss, and Hilda and Maude would have fits."

"Right O! We won't give the show away, you bet! By-the-bye, was it the clock in the lumber room you swopped for it? *That* wasn't going to a rummage sale. It was the one Daddy bought at the auction, and said he'd mend it up when he'd time. Don't you remember? He gave four pounds ten for it."

There was no disputing the horrible truth of Billy's information. Bert was ready to confirm it. Bob's face grew long. He saw trouble looming ahead over that clock. In the meantime, however, the pistol was his property. He fingered it joyously.

"We'll take it to the dug-out with us," he declared, "and practise shooting in the wood. One ought to be able to pop at rabbits with a pistol."

"Are we going this afternoon?" asked Billy, eagerly running to the window to survey the weather.

Instead of clearing up, however, the rain was pouring down harder than before. It seemed to descend in bucketfuls. A more hopelessly wet day could not be imagined. The Brigade decided that even a German spy was unlikely to brave the elements, and that their investigations might well be deferred till the skies cleared.

As the evening drew on, Connie's fears overcame her. She imagined burglars with every shriek of the wind and every tap of the ivy on the window-pane.

"It's worse than expecting zepps, and those are bad enough," she wailed.

"Buck up, old girl! We're ready for 'em. Let 'em all come!" blustered Bob.

He almost thought of showing her his pistol to comfort her, but concluded he had better not. He placed it under his pillow, however, on going to bed. He felt himself the guardian of the house while his father was at the front. The boys went peacefully to sleep that night, but Connie lay awake and shivered. She could not remember whether Hilda had really bolted the hall window or not. The uncertainty made her in such a fever of nervousness that at last she got up and crept softly downstairs to make sure.

Unfortunately she quite forgot the coal-box which Bob had placed as a burglar trap on the stairs, and as she fumbled her way along by the banisters she knocked against it and sent it flying. The noise was enough to waken even Bob. He jumped up in a second, clutched his pistol, and fired it at random out of the bedroom door. There were a crash and a piercing shriek.

At that critical moment Hilda appeared upon the scene with a candle. The light revealed no burglars, only father's most valuable Nankin china jar smashed to atoms, and Connie sitting on the stairs in a panic of terror. Her fright changed to wrath when she saw Bob's pistol. She dashed upstairs like a little avenging fury, and exerting all her elder sisterly authority, took it

forcibly from him and locked it up in her bedroom.

"It's a mercy nobody's killed! You wretched boy! What will mother say about this, I should like to know? And Daddy *will* be angry to find his jar smashed."

The obvious truth of these remarks, to say nothing of the fact that the antique clock had departed with the pedlar, kept Bob in a rather subdued state at breakfast time. He ate his porridge without argument, which was unusual for him. His spirits revived, however, when the meal was over; for the rain had stopped, and the sun was actually trying to break out through the clouds. The Slap-Bang Brigade winked at one another behind Connie's back, and slipped unobtrusively from the room. Maude saw them getting on their boots in the side hall, but she was magnanimous enough not to tell. She even cut them some thick slices of bread and butter to put in their pockets.

"You'll get into less mischief playing on the moor than if you stay racketing here, in my opinion," she remarked. "It's a riddance to have you out of the house. I'll keep you some dinner hot if you're a bit late."

(To be concluded.)

Would Rather Not.

THE teacher was having a hard time with the small boys of the grammar class. Finally she asked the most unruly one,—

"Johnny, can you decline 'to eat'?"

Johnny replied, "Yes'm, I can; but I don't like to."

Prize List for December.

ORIGINAL POEM COMPETITION.

1. Peggy Brown, 102 Glasgow Road, Clydebank. 2. John Cree, Poleglass, Dunmurry, Co. Antrim.

Honourable Mention.—Edwin Hammond, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop; Doreen I. Buss, Budgenor Cottage, Easebourne, near Midhurst; Marjorie Butler, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge.

ARITHMETICAL COMPETITION.

[The correct answer is that eighteen persons were present at the meeting at the start, eleven having left after the split.]

1. Norman D. Brown, "Brongreye," Cyprus Avenue, Bloomfield, Belfast. 2. Robert Harvey, 48 Mount Stewart Street, Shawlands, Glasgow.

Honourable Mention.—Willie Gray, 131 Oldpark Avenue, Belfast; Hugh Fraser, 16 Muirend Street, Kilbirnie, Ayrshire; Robert Leeper, Urney P.O., near Strabane, Co. Tyrone.

DRAWING AND COLOURING COMPETITION (A).

1. Ivy May Stubbs, Minshull Vernon Church of England School, near Crewe. 2. Ivy Furlong, Brynamlwg, The Avenue, Carmarthen.

Honourable Mention.—Mazoura Flockhart, 81 Brunstane Road, Joppa; Edward Macmillan, 6 Victoria Street, Alloa; Margaret Jack, 4 Weston Terrace, West Kilbride, Ayrshire; May Murray, 5 Pembroke Street, Glasgow; Beryl Stevens, 3 Kersal Gardens, Kersal, Manchester.

SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE COMPETITION (A).

1. Donald Gould, Gartsherrie, Shirley Road, Southampton. 2. Constance Hodgkiss, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge.

Honourable Mention.—Bert Overton, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop; Edith Hardy and Doris Ross, St. Dominic's School, High Street, Harpenden, Herts.

COMPOSITION COMPETITION.

1. P. Shuker, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop. 2. Noel Adrain, Sunnyside, Dublin Road, Omagh.

Honourable Mention.—Nellie Hollowbread, Southfield Cottages, Little Burstead, near Billericay, Essex; Alfred R. M. Pinckney, 12 Drumfrochar Road, Greenock; Mabel Sadler, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester.

WORD SQUARE COMPETITION.

1. William Edwards, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop. 2. Anna Gregg, Suffolk, Dunmurry, near Belfast.

Honourable Mention.—Campbell Archibald, 268 Whitehill Street, Dennistoun, Glasgow; Matthew Stevenson, Glenview, Chapelhall; Dorothy Durrant, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge.

DRAWING AND COLOURING COMPETITION (B).

1. Beth Robinson, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester. 2. Fred Driver, 134 Cock Hill Farm, Rubery, Birmingham.

Honourable Mention.—Anne Clay, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop; Nora Williams, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge.

SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE COMPETITION (B).

1. Gwendolyn Cottis, Welcome Bakery, Laindon, Essex. 2. Robina Wilson, 164 Auchinair Road, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow.

Honourable Mention.—Olive Brown, Doesgall Farm, Bulphan, near Romford, Essex; Ann Giles, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge; Charlotte M'Camley, Common Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim.

LETTER COMPETITION.

1. Bernard Gibbs, New Road, Rubery, Birmingham. 2. Monica Roy, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester.

Honourable Mention.—Edith Johnson, St. Dominic's School, High Street, Harpenden, Herts; Irene Dellar, Church Lane, Dunton, near Brentwood; Wilson Elder, 39 Duff Street, Edinburgh.

DRAWING AND COLOURING COMPETITION (C).

1. Minnie Clarke, Sumpners Farm, Dunton, Brentwood, Essex. 2. John Hickton, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge.

Honourable Mention.—Edith Hunt, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester; John Pattison, Green Mount, Grimshaw Lane, Bollington, near Macclesfield; John Ullathorne, 5 Whitepark Gorgie Road, Edinburgh.

The Acorn that Fell Down.

A MAN sitting under a fine oak tree noticed a large water-melon close by growing on a very slender stalk that ran straggling over a heap of rubbish.

"How foolish," said he, "that such a great melon should grow on so slender a plant, while little acorns grow on a massive tree. Now, if I had the making of things, I should let the acorns grow there and have the melons on this fine tree."

Just then a gust of wind blew, and an acorn fell from the branch overhead and hit the man on the head.

"Ah," said he, "perhaps it is a good thing after all that I had not the making of the world, or that great melon and not this little acorn would have fallen on my head."



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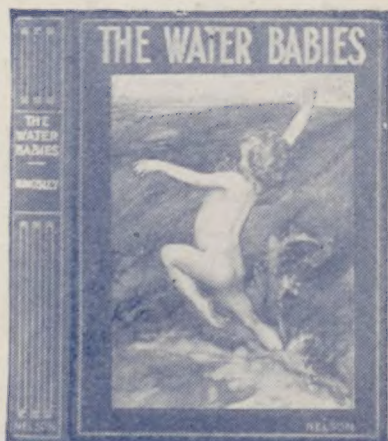
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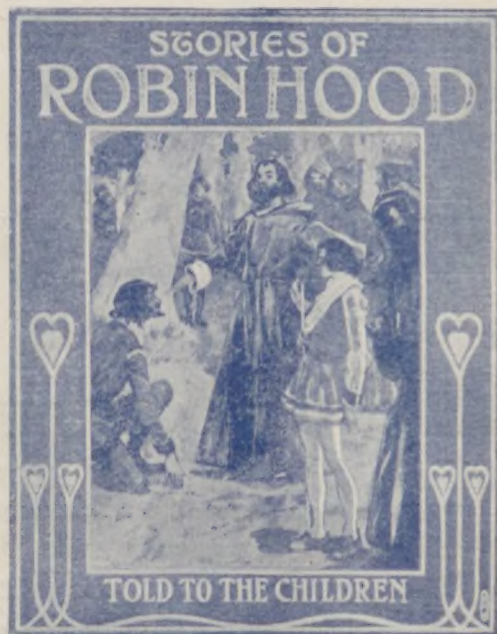


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